

LOUISIANA
Conservationist





J. Burton Angelle Sr., Secretary

THIS DEPARTMENT manages a recreational fishing and hunting industry that has an economic impact that exceeds one billion dollars annually in Louisiana. As the nation's top fish, seafood, fur and alligator producer, the economic impact of our commercial wildlife species, that we also manage, is equally impressive. We have purchased or acquired by donation in excess of 330,000 acres of land that will remain wild and open for all generations to come and manage a free-access wildlife management area system that is well over one million acres. All this we do on a yearly budget of less than one half of one percent of total state expenditures. And even that sum has traditionally been self generated.

What has been frosting on the cake for Louisiana sportsmen is that during all this time we have been able to maintain some of the lowest priced—if not the lowest priced—hunting and fishing licenses in the nation. This we have been able to do primarily because of oil and gas royalties generated on some of our coastal properties.

Well as Bob Dylan so aptly put it, "the times they are a-changin'." Last fiscal year we collected some

\$22,000,000 in mineral revenues. Through December 31st of this fiscal year, only \$6,000,000 had come in and oil prices were still on the way down. It doesn't take a mathematical genius to compute that the bottom line is not good.

Lean times invariably bring on a time of examination and trimming. It is symbolically akin to passing ore through the flames, having all the impurities burned away and ending up with pure gold. We are currently going through the flames and I welcome the cleansing such will bring. But I think to keep spending within current projected revenues a good bit of the pure gold will have to be sacrificed.

To keep this from happening, we will be asking the upcoming session of the Louisiana Legislature to consider an entirely new license fee schedule. It is the product of months of study by the license task force and will be a major departure from the status quo, especially in the areas of recreational and commercial fishing licenses. It will both simplify our current maze of commercial fishing licenses and will significantly increase revenues.

I am not exaggerating when I say we need it desperately if we are to maintain anything close to our current level of activity. But, without the active—and the emphasis is on the word active—support of sportsmen and other conservation minded Louisiana citizens, I am afraid that all the other pressing problems of the state and the hundreds of millions of dollars they require are going to occupy the attention of the Legislature and we may well get left at the starting gate.

I firmly believe all our lives will be affected economically and qualitatively by what becomes of our woods and waters and the wildlife and fish that inhabit both. I believe those who take the time to read this magazine share my belief, so I ask you to let your fellow sportsmen know—let your friends and neighbors know—and, most of all, let your legislators know that even in these lean times ahead conservation and the environment are still top priorities.



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Conservationist

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In This Issue

- 4 A Last Stand... a Lasting Victory**
by Bob Sheldon
Priceless woodland habitat in the Tensas River basin was slated for destruction until grass-roots democracy came to its rescue.
- 10 Threatened!** by Maurice Cockerham
Almost unbelievably, war in the mid-East posed a threat to a native Louisiana fish.
- 12 Eyeball to Eyeball with the Big Cats**
by Sara Ann Harris
Dan Brabham tells of the thrill of a boyhood pastime that even today hasn't let go of him—catfish grabbin'.
- 16 The Price of Pleasure** by Maurice Cockerham
Experience is a very effective teacher indeed, but with boating mishaps the wise man learns from the mistakes of others!
- 18 Beached!** by Sara Ann Harris
Word of the stranding of rare dolphins spread from coast to coast and drew attention to a solitary marsh island off of the Louisiana coast.
- 23 Wildlife Leases: Everyone Wins**
by Wade Byrd
The free lease remains today, as it was in the beginning, the backbone of the state's wildlife management area system.

Departments

- 26 Birding with Blue** by Blue Watson
- 27 Conservationnotes** Notes and news of interest to outdoor enthusiasts.
- 31 Bayou Kitchen** by Wayne Miller
Baked catfish, zucchini casserole and marinated carrots are featured in this issue.
- Front Cover** Tensas River scenic by Guy LaBranche
- Back Cover** Pensive raccoon by Bill Ford



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a Lasting Victory

By Bob Sheldon

Photography by Guy LaBranche

Like many stories, this one has its larger-than-life heroes and its suspenseful race against time. It is about love, too—the bred-in love of Louisiana citizens for their state's wondrous natural heritage.

THIRTY-ONE YEARS AGO, a young Army veteran and college student named Dan Dennett paused at his work and looked up at the looming oaks that surrounded him. High above, their leafy crests merged, soaking up the sun and turning the forest floor into a maze of shaded tunnels.

Dennett had spent his day among the aged trees collecting materials for Louisiana State University's now-famous museum displays of wildlife habitat. He was never to see them again.

Soon, chain saws growled and the 90-acre grove near Waverly—the last surviving patch of virgin woods in all of Louisiana—was leveled without a trace.

In the not-so-distant year of 1955, few looked with foreboding on that development. After all, there remained hundreds of thousands of acres of second-growth hardwood in the Tensas River basin. Interspersed with ridges and sloughs and floodplains, it sheltered a matchless diversity of wild animals.

A decade ago the woods still stretched for unbroken miles. What the lumbering interests took out, nature put back in, and through its management programs the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries kept much of the area habitable for both game and nongame species.

Then, with abrupt and accelerating swiftiness, the entire system of forestland began shrinking as new patterns of agriculture took hold in northeast Louisiana.

Just five years ago conservationists were predicting that tree removal would be virtually complete by 1991, and the mighty Tensas tract would no longer exist.

What happened next ranks without question as one of the most glorious chapters in the annals of conservation. It is a story with a happy ending: Some 71,000 acres has been spared from destruction and consecrated forever as wildlife habitat in the public domain.

Like many stories, this one has its larger-than-life heroes and its suspenseful race against time. It is about love, too—the bred-in love of Louisiana citizens for their state's wondrous natural heritage.

A Last Stand...

And beyond all that, it is a ringing affirmation of America's commitment to democratic principles. A handful of individuals sounding an alarm, tens of thousands responding to the call, a putting aside of factional politics in the centers of government and eventual victory for a cherished cause. Could any scenario be more pat?

The geographical treasure at the heart of this drama is the range of hardwood bottomlands that follows the placid, meandering course of the 170-mile-long Tensas River and extends into portions of Franklin, Madison and Tensas parishes. The stream is named for the Indian tribe that once hunted along its banks.

Besides aquatic plants, vegetation in the basin's swampy stretches includes bald cypress, tupelo gum, buttonbush and black willow. Overcup oak, bitter pecan, swamp red maple, hackberry green ash and American elm abound on the low floodplain. Ridges rise as high as 40 feet, and on them grow Nuttall oak, cherrybark oak, water oak, willow oak, cow oak, sweet pecan and sweetgum.

This varied terrain nourishes more than 50 species of mammals, including deer, squirrel, rabbit, bobcat, fox and raccoon. It also contains turkeys and a host of fishes, amphibians and reptiles, including alligators.

Flocks of migratory waterfowl pass the winter or stop to rest amid flooded timber or on small lakes while making their twice-yearly treks on the Mississippi Flyway. More than 70 species of nongame birds have been counted.

If you are lucky, you can still spot a bald eagle or even a black bear, but the Florida panther and the red wolf apparently are gone for good. The last ivory-billed woodpecker was sighted in 1943.

The science of wildlife management was still in its infancy in 1920 when the state agency that preceded the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries first received permission to conduct systematic conservation in the area. The prime landowner was the Singer Manufacturing Co., and its holdings became known as the Singer Wildlife Refuge.

Ownership of the land was transferred to the Ayres Lumber Co. and later to the Chicago Mill & Lumber Co., but it remained a refuge.

By 1957 deer were overrunning the site, and turkey, squirrel and other game were plentiful. Wildlife and Fisheries negotiated an agreement creating a 100,000-acre Wildlife Management Area.

The change in status meant that, under state supervision, the tract opened its gates to hunters, fishermen, trappers, campers, birdwatchers, hikers, sightseers, picnickers, nature students, photographers, boaters and nature lovers of every other persuasion.

The Chicago Mill WMA attracted steady patronage from Shreveport, Monroe, Alexandria and more distant cities, and rapidly became the department's most popular management area.

In 1966 the bubble burst. Chicago Mill demanded that the state enter into a paid lease and, when that was not forthcoming, canceled the WMA deal and leased out



Boy Scouts, boaters, campers, hunters, hikers and photographers were among the nature-loving citizens who generated an avalanche of 30,000 letters to "Save the Tensas." Here a truckload of missives is about to be dispatched to lawmakers in Washington.

hunting rights to private clubs. That situation prevailed into the 1980s.

Meantime, the agricultural picture in Louisiana had undergone drastic shifts. Mechanization made it economically feasible to clear, drain and cultivate lands that had never previously been utilized. At the same time, the world's growing hunger for protein transformed the humble soybean into a high-paying glamour crop.

Chicago Mill itself decided to cash in on the soybean boom. In five years prior to 1981, the company pulled down 15,000 acres of woodland and laid plans to step up the pace.

At this point a young Shreveport businessman and conservation enthusiast made up his mind that what was left had to be saved.

Markham A. Dickson Jr., then just entering his 30s, is the scion of a pioneer Louisiana family that has been engaged in the pharmaceutical trade since 1841. Associates call him Skipper.

Dickson attended Colorado College to major in the subject closest to his heart, environmental science. He received a master's degree in business administration from the University of Texas before joining Morris & Dickson Co., a wholesale distributorship.

In June 1981 Dickson brought together a group of conservation-minded persons from both private and public sectors, and the Tensas Conservancy Coalition was born.

Represented at the organizational meeting were the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and such old-line stalwarts as the Louisiana Wildlife Federation and Ducks Unlimited. But among others there were also people from the League of Women Voters, a nature-study society and a coon hunters' club.

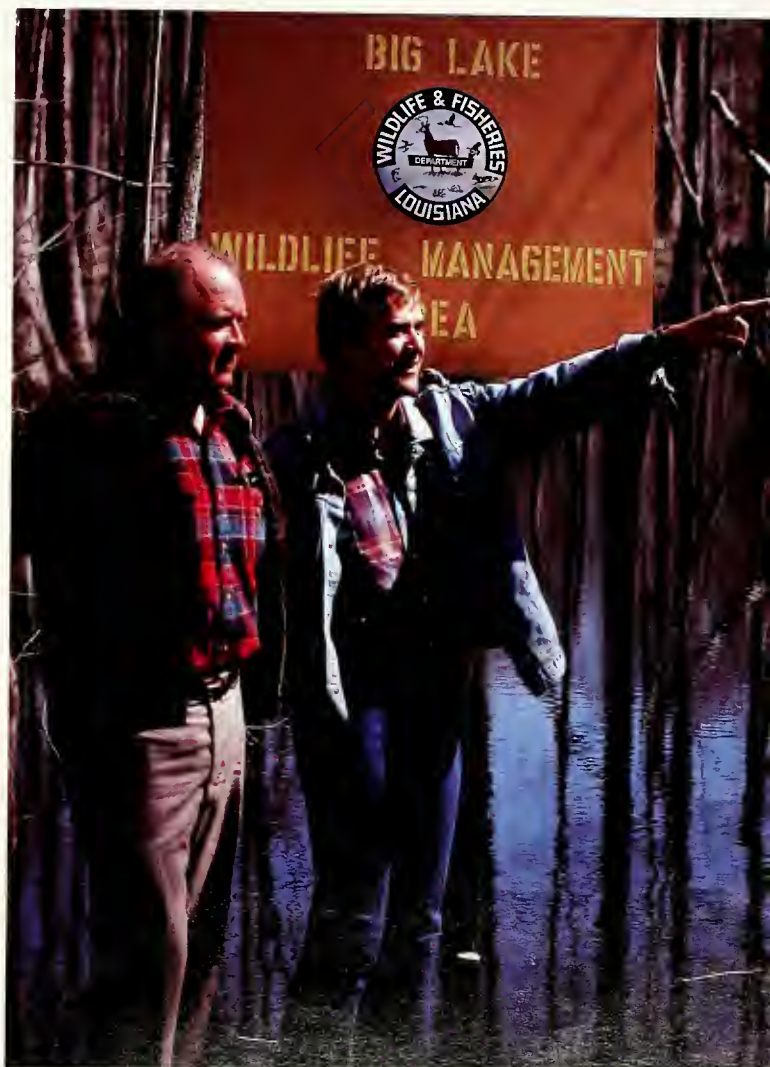
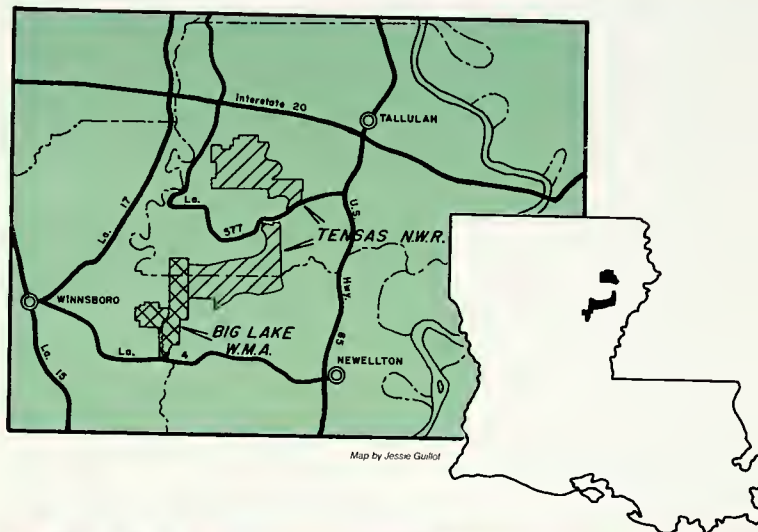
As his co-chairman, Skipper Dickson obtained the services of Richard K. Yancey, one of the nation's most distinguished leaders in wildlife management. Yancey had served as assistant secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and as executive director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Conservation. He is now vice president for wildlife management of Williams, Inc.

Dickson and Yancey got to work with only one objective: to preserve for posterity 100,000 acres of precious wildlife habitat. To accomplish this, they rode off in all directions, and, on hindsight, the speed with which they got results borders on the incredible.

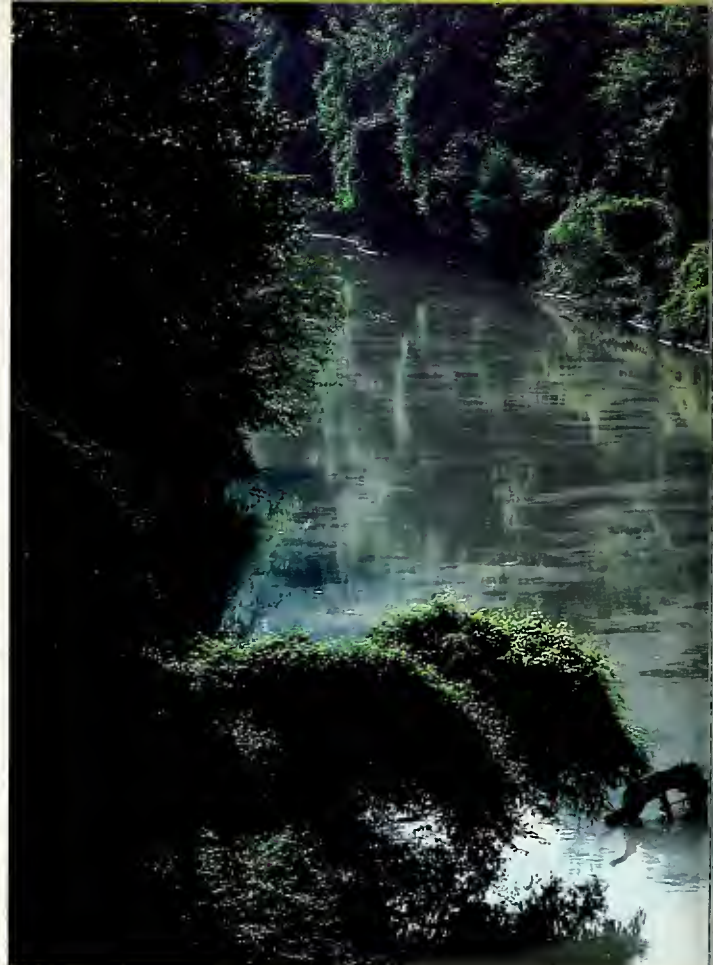
In less than six months the Tensas Conservancy was riding a groundswell of public support. It was endorsed by affiliates numbering more than 100,000 members and had mobilized a statewide network of volunteers to carry the message to garden clubs, sportsmen's leagues, Boy Scout troops.

Financed by donations, newsletters kept the campaigners informed of progress and gave them a pat on the back when due. Encouragement came from residents of other states, particularly Mississippi.

The targeted acreage was owned entirely by Chicago Mill, which in previous years had rebuffed State of Louisiana efforts to discuss a transaction but now was getting in a mood to sell. The Tensas Conservancy



Led by Richard Yancey (left) and Skipper Dickson, the Tensas Conservancy Coalition spearheaded a campaign that placed 71,737 acres of prime wildlife habitat under public ownership. They're now seeking further acreage through easements from landowners.



Change of seasons only adds to beauty of Tensas forest

earmarked 50,000 acres for acquisition by the federal government and 50,000 by the state.

The U.S. Congress had already, in 1980, moved to create a Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge. But Congress has been known to espouse a popular cause and then balk at funding it, and in 1981 the money crunch was on.

Nonetheless, the Tensas Conservancy enlisted the unanimous backing of the Louisiana congressional delegation. Sen. J. Bennett Johnston and Rep. Jerry Huckaby were among those who took the initiative in prying loose the needed cash.

It came, but the mills of representative government often grind slow. When a hitch developed in the spring of 1983, the Conservancy mounted a "Last Stand" letter-writing campaign. It unleashed a flood of 30,000 missives.

The letters ran the gamut from erudite appeals to a haltingly penned note from a 69-year-old man who wanted to do his bit for the "fewchure"; he enclosed a \$50 check for expenses.

A 10,628-acre national refuge was dedicated in November 1982. Thereafter, parcel after parcel in Madison and Tensas parishes was purchased and annexed until the refuge covered 52,516 acres. The total cost was \$49,950,000 plus \$50,000 for administrative expenses.

The federal refuge is open to the public, including hunters and fishermen, but in general regulations are more restrictive than those governing state management areas.

On the state front, the Conservancy gained the cooperation of Gov. David C. Treen and his secretary of Wildlife and Fisheries, Jesse J. Guidry. When the Republican officeholders were replaced by a Democratic administration, Gov. Edwin W. Edwards and Secretary J. Burton Angelle Sr. got behind the Tensas project.

Under the direction of such executives as Joe L. Herring, now assistant secretary for wildlife, the department already was pursuing a policy of acquiring prime habitat for preservation and for public recreational use. Dewey Wills, since retired, handled many of the purchases as they were worked out.

The Department of Wildlife and Fisheries uses no tax monies when buying land. Indeed, the department is self-sustaining. It earns most of its income by leasing out oil and gas production rights on its properties, notably the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge. All capital outlays, however, require the approval of the Louisiana Legislature.

Once again the Tensas Conservancy rallied its forces to "beat the bulldozer" as, owing to unavoidable time lapses, some forested acreage was in fact lost to row-crop farming.

It prevailed upon the policy-making Wildlife and Fisheries Commission to grant priority status to the Tensas undertaking. A concurrent resolution was pushed through the state House and Senate. Grass-roots zeal was rekindled.

The state acquisition was carried out in three stages. The first parcel, purchased in 1983, comprised 9,823.47

acres. The second, in 1984, was 4,887.63 acres. The final sale, consummated only last January, covered 4,510.27 acres. The 19,221.37 acres cost a total of \$18,292,322.50.

The tract forms the Big Lake Wildlife Management Area. It touches upon the Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge. Together they add up to 71,737 acres of wildlife habitat under public guardianship.

It might be expected that, with all available land purchased and government funds depleted, the Tensas Conservancy Coalition would be content to take a bow and pass into history.

Just the opposite. The Conservancy now has a program well under way that could prove more significant than anything it has done so far.

With the help of prominent conservationists chosen for the purpose, the Conservancy is appealing to Louisiana landowners to permit easements on their property that would preserve it in perpetuity as wildlife habitat. Title and control of the land are left with the owner, and tax concessions are arranged.

Already 2,000 acres has been placed under easement, half of it adjacent to management areas and refuges. Many conservationists regard this as the way of the future in a state like Louisiana where 90 percent of the land is in private hands.

The Conservancy's Skipper Dickson and Richard Yancey are slow to accept credit for themselves and quick to insist that recognition be accorded to the thousands who joined in the Tensas rescue effort. Among these are the biologists and other staff members of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, both active and retired.

Dickson and Yancey can always look for a helping hand from Dan Dennett, who carries in his memory an image of the last stand of virgin woodland. Dennett retired earlier this year after a productive career with Wildlife and Fisheries.

A few weeks before he did, Dennett took a friend for a drive through the Big Lake WMA. It was a bitterly cold and windy day, and their winch-equipped truck slipped and skidded over a roadway blazed generations ago by loggers laying rails for their donkey engines.

"There's a bare patch we'll have to fill in with hardwoods," Dennett pointed out. "In 10 or 20 years we'll have an ideal variety of trees and undergrowth producing food and shelter for wildlife.

"Over there, gumtrees are being picked out and harvested to improve habitat conditions. And that decimated, flooded area that looks like a war zone—beavers did that with their dams. Our people can reclaim that so other animals can use it, too.

"You know, this Tensas movement came in the nick of time. We were afraid we had lost all this."

Dennett smiled when asked about the location of the long-gone oaks he remembered from his student days. The spot is encircled by the Tensas River national refuge. Trees will live there from now on.



Joe Herring (left) and Dewey Wills worked out details of Tensas basin land purchases by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Herring now is assistant secretary for wildlife while Wills has retired.



Dan Dennett remembers the last of Louisiana's virgin woodlands. In the course of his career as a Wildlife and Fisheries biologist, he saw the great Tensas forests threatened with extinction, then rescued by a dramatic grass-roots movement.



Threatened!

The fishing effort was accompanied by appalling waste. The commercial fishermen were simply gutting the fish to remove the egg sacs and then callously discarding the carcasses.

By Maurice Cockerham

"IN ACCORDANCE WITH the emergency provisions of R.S. 49:953(B), the Administrative Procedures Act, and under the authority of R.S. 56:22, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission hereby declares..."

On February 6, 1986 the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission used its legal powers to intervene in a problem created half a world away.

Quite simply, the problem was intense commercial fishing pressure on a native Louisiana fish which the commission labeled "detrimental to the perpetuation of this species." The fishing effort was accompanied by appalling waste. The commercial fishermen were simply gutting the fish to remove the large egg sacs and then callously discarding the carcasses.

The fish is *Polyodon spathula*, more readily identified in this state as the spoonbill catfish or paddlefish. Biologists call the spoonbill a "primitive" species. It is a link to earlier millennia...a remnant of a prehistoric family of fishes. Its single living relative is *Psephurus gladius*, found only in the waterways of the Yangtze Valley in China.

Once abundant throughout the Mississippi Valley from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada, it is now found only in isolated locations from Ohio and Missouri southward.

Oddly enough, the spoonbill has become a victim of the ongoing conflict between Iraq and Iran.

Before those two nations decided to engage in their current mutual population reduction plan, they exported much of the world's supply of roe (fish eggs, to you and me) for the production of caviar.

Strange as it may seem, a lot of that stuff shows up at penthouse parties and condominium conclaves in the United States. Once the supply of fish eggs from afar dried up, the spoonbill was in trouble, and therein lies yet another tale.

Once upon a time there was a fish known as the lake sturgeon and it was a prima source of roe (eggs) for caviar. Several species of sturgeon still exist but a number of factors have conspired to greatly reduce the population. As an example, if you eat the eggs you don't get many little fishes.

By the end of the last century, sturgeon stocks were depleted and the spoonbill, a "second choice" source of roe, found its commercial value escalating. That is a dangerous situation for any critter.

The annual spoonbill "catch" prior to the turn of the present century is anybody's guess, but the few available figures reveal the effects of intense fishing pressure combined with channelization, dam building and other progress.

In 1899 the total U.S. harvest amounted to 1,105 metric tons. Between 1965 and 1975, however, the average yearly take was only 260 tons.

The accompanying map provides even more graphic

illustration of the plight of the spoonbill.

As the world grew ever smaller due to improvements in transportation and food preservation, foreign sources of roe diverted much, but not all, attention from the spoonbill. In recent decades, some states have seen dwindling stocks of spoonbills wiped out completely. Others have reacted just in time to list the fish as threatened or endangered in an attempt to avoid its disappearance.

The outbreak of war between Iraq and Iran renewed interest in spoonbill roe and it is now worth \$40-\$50 per pound. The flesh, however, is not in equal demand and that fact has created the awesome waste depicted at the beginning of this article.

The spoonbill does not take bait. It feeds by swimming slowly with its large, toothless mouth agape, filtering quantities of zooplankton from the water. As a result, few are caught by recreational fishermen.

There is a dearth of information concerning the spoonbill. In fact, recent commercial fishing efforts revealed populations of spoonbills in locations which surprised some fisheries biologists. This lack of information has been a direct result of the lack of commercial or recreational interest in the fish, but that situation has now turned about.

The recent action of the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission prohibited commercial fishing for spoonbills for 120 days. At the same time, the commission published notice of intent to suspend all such commercial fishing for a period of three years.

In the interim, department biologists will launch an effort to develop a sound resource management plan for the species.

What is now known indicates that it is extremely susceptible to damage from commercial pressure.

It is one of the largest freshwater fishes in North America, reported to attain a weight of 160 pounds and length of seven feet although most specimens are

considerably smaller. The larger fish are invariably females.

It also possesses a skeleton composed of cartilage rather than bone.

Spoonbills grow rapidly and are quite long-lived, with a life span of 20 years being common and 30 or more years not uncommon.

On the other side of that coin, a female spoonbill will not reach sexual maturity until sometime between the seventh and fourteenth year. Even then, they are believed to spawn only once every two years and the spawning intervals may well be longer.

One of the spoonbill's many distinct and unique features is the long, flat snout. Biologists do not know the purpose of the fish's unusual proboscis, but it is apparently not used to stir up the bottom. As mentioned earlier, the fish feeds on microscopic plants and animals suspended near the surface of the water.

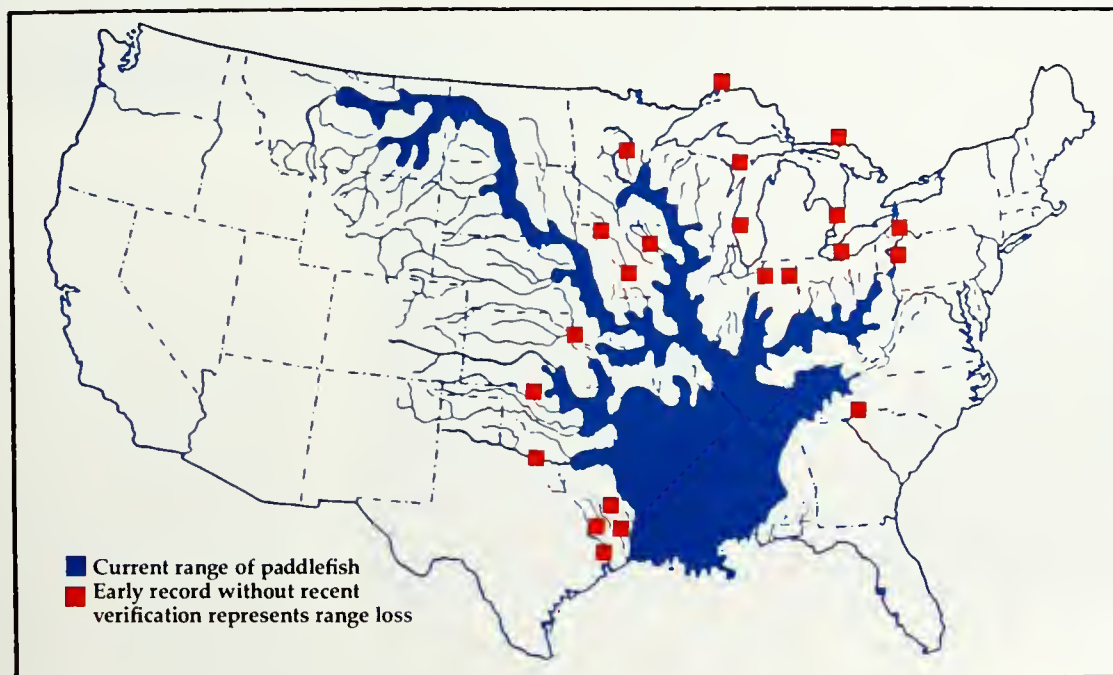
Habitat requirements of the spoonbill are reportedly very specific. It spends most of its life in quiet, slow-moving water rich in zooplankton and is very mobile without a "home territory." In fact, movements of 260 miles in six weeks have been recorded.

During the spawning season, however, the spoonbill must have access to large free-flowing rivers with clean gravel bars or bottoms.

Interesting though it may be, that is not enough information for fisheries biologists to work with.

Louisiana is one of a very few states retaining a good population of spoonbills. The Wildlife and Fisheries Commission has dug in its heels to protect that enviable position. Now the future of the spoonbill falls to the department's fisheries biologists.

Theirs is the responsibility to determine whether the spoonbill can tolerate commercial fishing pressure at all and, if so, how to regulate that pressure to insure the protection and perpetuation of the species.



Eyeball to Eyeball with the Big Cats

By Sara Ann Harris



"You're on your own when you go grabbin'—fighting hand to hand."

Photography by Bill Ford

"ONCE YOU GRAB CATS, it's hard to get out of your blood." Dan recounted over the phone the story of his first catfish "grab." The call was long distance and it required a special trip back to my office. But already, after just one conversation with Dan Dan the Grabbin' Man, as we came to call him, I'd been struck with the grabbin' fever.

It was spring, when the flathead catfish whipped out downed trees to ready them for the spawning ritual. Dan, then thirteen, was on his way to the Amite River with his cousin Willie Joe and was remembering that "grandpa and them used to catch the big catfish" grabbin'.

The Amite was cold. It shimmied in the wind as if it felt the same rush that ran up the boys' spines when they dipped into it. Willie Joe warned Dan against grabbin' in

muddy waters where snapping turtles and snakes, just as likely finds in hollow logs, could hide behind the murk.

Finally, Willie found a good log—something Dan was to come to recognize by a mere touch—smooth on the inside, sand packed down, clean. The male catfish had done his job well and was sure to be guarding his keep, the eggmass. Perhaps the female would even still be in the log.

"It only eats live bait unless he is terrible hungry," Willie Joe said. "And it will eat anything that's alive." He eased his arm into the wide old cypress, and let out a holler. "He (the catfish) grabbed. But he didn't grab as hard as Willie Joe grabbed me," Dan remembered. That twenty-eight pounder "made me a grabber for life."

I jotted down notes furiously. It was as if all along Dan Brabham of Kentwood—a natural storyteller with good timing and a subtle sense of humor—had been expecting my call. Ready with his story. Ready to go snag another thirty pound spotted cat.

It promised to be his eighth catch this season. Grabbers are not in it for the numbers: "Any man can get a hoop net and catch cat by the dozens but without near the sport of grabbin'. You're on your own when you go grabbin'—fighting hand to hand."

And their hands sometimes get the worst of it: "They (the catfish's teeth) are like sandpaper almost. A catfish on the Tickfaw once hit me unobstructed. He was a bad fish and I tell you he tore all the skin off of these fingers. The back-side of the skin here looked like you had taken a thousand razor blades and just sliced it. You could take a toothpick or something and stick it in and just pick that skin off."

Before I hung up the phone we set a date. It was a holiday but something in Dan's tone prompted me and photographer Bill Ford to come out. At a crossroads, Dan invited me (now equipped with a pocket recorder) to hear out his story on the way to the river.

At every bridge, he scanned the riverbanks for trees near falling that would be grabbin' logs in later seasons. This was part of his continuous vigil on such rivers as the Amite, the Comite, the Tickfaw, the Tangipahoa, and the Bogue Chitto. In scouting out logs, he explained, he also kept an eye on the rivers' changes: "In a place you might-a-hadda log last year, it'll be 50 yards from the river. To stay

on top of it you gotta get in every year and look again."

Catfish also clear out dens in riverbanks. Dan remembered outloud his last den grabbing experience: "My brothers grabbed me by the ankles and shoved me in (the den). I told them to pull me out when I kicked. Eyeball to eyeball with a twelve pound blue cat, I grabbed it by the bottom lip. I kicked. They pulled. My t-shirt got caught up on a root and they thought I wanted to go deeper. So they pushed me and blue down in. I kicked again. My t-shirt snagged again. They pushed and I was about to get in a panic. But by now

they figured something was stuck somewhere and yanked me out."

Dan had talked me right through the unloading and a bateau ride up to his log. Its gnarled roots were protruding and caused folds in the quick-moving water that quibbled and "tsk'd" over the obstacle in its flow. The grabbin' man selected an ironwood stick to check the log. Its density is approximately that of water so Dan could direct the rod easily into the log without it floating up or sinking.

Thump. "I felt that," Bill said standing on the beech tree. Dan raised his head from underwater and withdrew the rod saying sim-



Dan Dan the Grabbin' Man crafts a rig for every log he fishes.

ply, "We got us a fish."

Out came the weight belt, poles of various sizes and lengths, gloves, hooks, masks, ropes, knives, and burlap sacks of leaves. Dan began crafting a rig. The situation called for snagging with a ten foot wooden pole scored near the end, and a "small" hook wrapped on. When the fish hits, it snaps off the scored tip and loses the advantage of prying itself away from a firm pole, Dan explained. The spotted cat is left spinning wildly on the end of a line. Generally, then Dan draws the catch out of his hiding place, past the sacks he stuffed in to bar the opening, and runs a tie-off line behind his bottom jaw, leaving

the cat free to swim along. Once the fish knows he's caught, he becomes pretty docile.

That day we were working a long log in which the fish could retreat into its top buried in the riverbed. We were also fretting over the weather that was rolling in over the trees. As the wind picked up it urged us in a stage whisper to move on. The ex-Houston Oiler raised up his frizzly wet head with a burst of expiration and read the sky, then returned to his sport. But rain and crackles of lightning soon sparked us back to the road and to Dan's mother's house to still the chill.

Over coffee Dan picked up his

story where he had left off: "It's sort of an unwritten code up here, amongst the grabbers, that if I go with you and we find a log together, then I'm free to come to it by myself and you're free to come to it by yourself. Or we can come together. But don't bring anyone else to your log."

Dan soon whisked us back out onto the wriggling highways of Louisiana, which he had obviously begun driving about the same time he started grabbin'. Bill and I rounded each bend just in time to catch a glimpse of what we came to call his Crab Rig. In the mist, the motor's mechanical parts were mandibles and the trailer lights



An ironwood stick, Dan explained, has a density approximately the same as water.



Dan eases the aluminum rod into the belly of a downed tree to check for a male catfish.

set on posts askew "looked" back at us as the "crab" scurried sidewise at each turn.

But the lightning had been a bad omen and after checking two more logs we headed home empty handed but not without plans to hit it again after the weekend.

Monday we got the jump on the situation early so as to miss the afternoon rains. Back at the original log, we were after the elusive cat questioning if we hadn't already scared him off altogether. Dan snaked the ironwood rod down the log.

Thump. We all heard it this time.

He intended to snag the fish on the first hit so the flathead wouldn't

scare and retreat to the belly of the log. Dan ritualistically stuffed the opening and two catfaces with sacks of leaves, strapped on the weight belt, wrapped the line coil by coil to secure the hook in place, stationed me line in hand at the hollow opening and submerged.

Thump. He sounded serious.

Absorbed in thinking out each step of his attack, when Dan reared his head he was in mid-sentence. Then he ducked again and I felt the line jerk.

With a spray of river water Dan surfaced and his catch slapped at the water defiantly. A very spotted muscular twenty plus pound catfish was in the grab of the broad

shouldered athlete. Catching his breath Dan said, "Now this is a small one."

On the road back, Bill and I lost Dan. But as we approached a bridge we recognized him covering the flathead in his Crab Rig near the river. We all looked at one another grinning broadly. Standing in the drizzle, Dan said, "I need to check just a few logs while I'm over this way."

Editor's Note: The subject of this article is an expert swimmer and well experienced at what he is doing. Supervision from someone equally well versed is recommended for novice participants in the unusual sport.



The grabbers' moment of glory.



Dan and a happy convert to the art of catfish grabbin'.



The Price of Pleasure

Pleasure has its price. Fail to pay the

By Maurice Cockerham

IT HAPPENED SO SUDDENLY there simply was no time to do anything. No time even to think.

It had been a very pleasant summer day on Blood River near Springfield. The fishing wasn't particularly great, but I really didn't care. I was relaxing and thoroughly enjoying an outing, alone, on what was then a fairly isolated and deserted stretch of water.

Putting the rod away, I touched the key and pointed the bow downstream toward the junction of Blood River and the larger Tickfaw River.

A new fishing rig added a lot to my pleasure. It was a fifteen foot aluminum bateau powered by a 25 horsepower motor. It was also equipped with a "stick steering" rig mounted toward the bow and connected to the motor with a push-pull cable. The upholstered top of a center mounted live-well provided seating. It all worked fine, but it was wrong. Deathly wrong.

Trouble came suddenly...intensely...with no hint of warning. There was a jolt as the lower unit of the outboard struck something. The steering stick was ripped from my hand and the boat made a skidding, instantaneous turn, pitching me violently from my seat.

In far less time than it takes to tell it, I was thrown against the gunwale, clawing to avoid going overboard. Fighting the centrifugal force of the turn, I started to reach for the steering stick, which had slammed fully down against the floor of the boat.

Friend, the recollection of the next few microseconds solidly reinforces my belief in divine intervention.

As I started my lunge for the controls, I knew with absolute certainty that I would never make it. Without

conscious thought I saw the tree ... cypress, solid, massive...and knew full well the boat would curve headlong into it.

Had I remained kneeling in that bateau I would not be here to relate this tale. The collision would assuredly have pitched me solidly into that gnarled cypress with fatal force.

I do recall throwing myself full-length in the bottom of the boat, my feet braced against the light, aluminum bow platform.

There is only the faintest memory of shattering impact. My next full recollection is the chill of approaching and inescapable death. There was the sound of the outboard still churning a froth. Unknown to me, the bow of the boat was set back a full two feet and warped into a U-shape around the cypress trunk...the motor holding it in position.

There was also the unmistakable sound of water gurgling into the rear of the boat. I would later learn that the transom brace had rammed through the bottom of the bateau on impact. At the time, I knew only that cold water was creeping under my shoulder blades. The boat was sinking!

For my part, I was totally helpless. There was no pain whatsoever. I simply could not raise a hand, move a leg, nor turn my head to assay the wreckage. I was totally paralyzed and cold death was creeping around my shoulders.

Salvation came in the form of two strangers ... rumpled fishermen who had heard the crash from somewhere downriver. I regret to say that to this day I do not know



nd...

the names of the men who saved my life. Had they chosen to ignore the noise, or had they hesitated, this tale would be simply another boating accident statistic.

That brings me, finally, to my purpose in relating this sequence of events. You see, every pleasure indeed has a price and the price of safe, enjoyable boating is forethought. Fail to pay that price honestly and fairly and you may, as I did, look death in the face.

A reconstruction of that near-tragedy reveals no less than three such failures on my part. One could have prevented the entire situation, one may well have allowed me to react successfully, and the last can only be classified as absolute stupidity.

In the first case, my motor control was not equipped with a kill switch. A simple little \$10 device, a kill switch would have shut down the outboard at the very instant I was thrown from my seat. They are available as a pressure switch in the seat itself or as a plug-in module that attaches to a belt or belt loop. Their value in an emergency is incalculable.

I was also riding a treacherous mount. An elevated seat with no arm rests or other side supports is a fool's throne. Complicate that with only a steering lever, denying the operator even the questionable support of a solidly mounted wheel, and the potential for disaster is complete.

The final error of that tragic sequence is one that has accounted for more boating deaths than any other and, at once, the easiest to avoid. I was not WEARING a life jacket...a personal flotation device.

That single omission all but eradicated the "surviva-

bility factor." Despite all the other errors...despite the paralyzing injuries resulting from the collision...had I been wearing a PFD I would have had a better-than-even chance of surviving in the aftermath even though the boat sank.

Please note that there were several PFDs in my boat at the time of the mishap, yet they were totally without value. They would have been equally as worthless to me had I been hurled from the boat, perhaps hitting my head on the gunwale or being struck by the propeller.

Now, each time I go afloat I pay the price for my pleasure. I take a few moments to be absolutely sure that SAFETY is the first passenger aboard and the last passenger ashore. I make a point to check the kill switch, the seating, the steering, the fire extinguishers. I have taken the Boating Safety Course offered by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries as well as several others.

Most importantly, I take off my PFD...my life jacket...when I step ashore and not before.

I go a'boating now and I feel the chill of that Blood River water against my back each time I see hunters wearing hip boots or waders in a boat, bow riders laughing gaily with their legs dangling over the gunwales, drunks at the helm, and the great majority of adult boaters sitting on their PFDs. Each time it brings to mind an ominous quotation from my childhood... "Rush on fool, hell ain't half full."

I have "seen the elephant," and I know. Heed my warning. Pay the price, fairly and honestly, for your pleasure.



Beached!

By Sara Ann Harris
Photography by Guy LaBranche

*There was to be some gain then even in this sad loss of
forty-seven dolphins that suffered the "nasty fate of exposure and suffocation."*

Charles Potter
Smithsonian Institution

WEATHER AND ITS capriciousness is what had brought us all out to this virtually uninhabited island off of the coast of central Louisiana. Hurricane Juan, a severe storm that had hovered nearby at the end of October, beached what at first were only suspected of being small, tropical Atlantic, deep-water dolphins which until recently had puzzled the scientific community. This proved to be the largest stranding ever of these rare marine mammals. Curious research specialists, university professors and their graduate students, and wildlife biologists all huddled over one of the forty-

seven lost creatures at Point au Fer, a solitary marsh island off southern Terrebonne Parish.

When the news had gotten out on the dolphins, phones jangled from Louisiana to California to Washington, D.C. We cranked up pickups, hitched rides on helicopters and hopped outgoing crew boats to make it out to see our visitors from the deep.

The Louisiana weather was true to form. So there we stood dripping and shivering and speculating on how this could have come about. Pete Juneau, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries coastal study leader, pointed out that

before Hurricane Juan reports were made of offshore sea life being collected inshore. High salinity levels and better water quality, the results of earlier hurricanes, were conducive to deep-sea life being drawn "inland."

The turbulent waters caused by Hurricane Juan apparently had then disoriented the dolphins, which rely on sonar (the bouncing of impulses to establish a location). Dr. H.D. Hoese of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, who has studied hurricanes for some twenty years, then suggested that the bubbles in the turbulence absorbed and scattered the dolphins' pro-

ected sounds. The dolphins' use of the seafloor's slope to determine a seaward direction may have been further complicated in the shallow water by shoals, which make for a bottom with misleading rises and falls. He added that the lost and struggling dolphins, exhausted by the intensity of a storm which had lingered there for four days, perhaps drowned.

They were sighted, Juneau then explained, by Ray Robicheaux, a businessman and pilot of Terrebonne Parish, shortly after Juan as Robicheaux flew over the Gulf side of Point au Fer (which had been entirely under water during the storm). When Juneau went out to confirm Robicheaux's report, he found dug-outs in the sand near a few of the dolphins, apparently made by the flailing mammals which were still alive as they attempted to return to the sea.

Via the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries word of the beaching even reached the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), Smithsonian Institution, where the headquarters for the study of strandings is housed. So, technicians Charles Potter and William McLellan had also made their way out to this marsh where the delineation between land and water was very questionable. There was to be some gain even in this sad loss of dolphins that suffered the "nasty fate of exposure and suffocation," as Potter expressed it. A stranding allows scientists a close look at animals infrequently seen much less studied in their natural habitat. And in this case the dolphins were suspected of being an especially perplexing species.

While walking the far-away island coast with us, Potter and McLellan made notes with weather-tested materials that quickly yielded to this wet and wind. Though an afterall merciless place for human beings, it was obviously a winter home to waterfowl. Tern and seagulls inched their way toward us to inspect the intrusion. And snowy egrets stood poised dramatically in the grass. "This stranding is outstanding to me," Potter explained while collecting data. "We have a couple of animals we think are females and all the rest (that are identifiable)

are males. And the few that I've seen the backbones on (the elasticity between vertebrae being an indication of physical maturity or immaturity) are all physically immature. Maybe this is a social group that consists only of immature males. Mustache dolphins (nicknamed for the black feathered mark across their beaks) perhaps at the onset of puberty are driven off." Later, William Perrin, an expert on *Stenella* (this genus), elaborated on this idea via long distance phone call saying that juvenile males in many dolphin species may leave the breeding school (a social group of adults and offspring) to make a life of their own, so to speak. He considers this a widespread mammalian phenomenon, which even people customarily engage in.

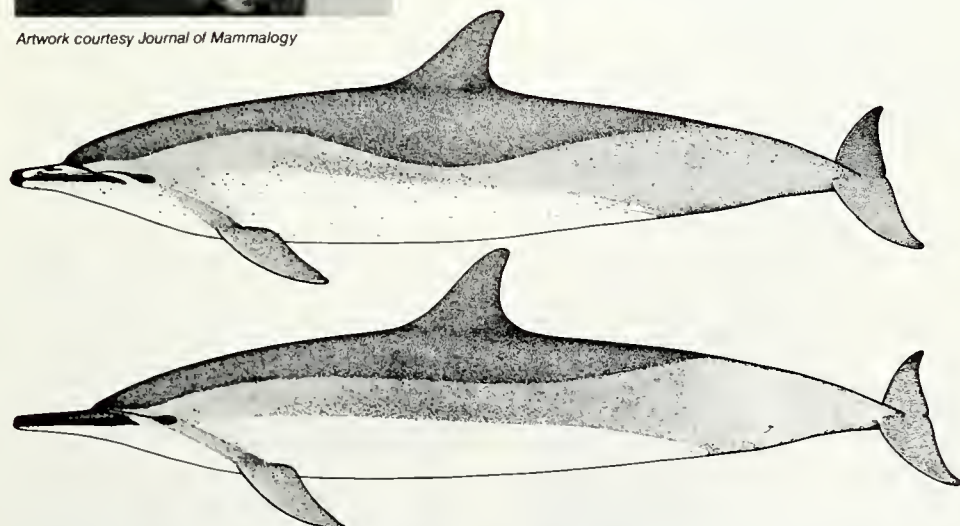


Artwork courtesy Journal of Mammalogy

Loaded down with the strange gadgetry of the science world and the more familiar (but probably heavier) gadgetry of the photography world, we made our way in late afternoon across the bog to our ride. Mobile Oil Company was very graciously putting up myself and photographer Guy LaBranche along with Potter (Charlie) and McLellan (Bill). Everyone else had done what at that moment seemed the sensible thing to do given the rain's ferociousness—gone home. The place was simple. It was small, but with no shortage on hospitality. Tom Dontay treated us to heaps of good, hot food—ready every time we stepped in the door—and warmly shared that cabin on stilts overlooking the moist marsh grasses where he had worked for thirty-three of the outpost's thirty-four years. It was there, after my brain thawed, that I heard the whole story on the beached *Stenella clymene*, the existence of which was for a long time uncertain.

Potter began by explaining that William Perrin, a senior scientist at the Southwest Fisheries Center (NMFS), and several of his colleagues in 1981 put to rest the confusion over this species. It resembles the spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*) externally and curiously enough has a skull (the measurements of which are a basic

Front view of *S. clymene* showing distinctive "mustache."



Color patterns of rare *S. clymene*, top, resemble those of *S. longirostris*, bottom.



(A). Remains of rare dolphins are strewn across wide area of Point au Fer beach.



(B). Smithsonian technicians Bill McLellan and Charlie Potter (center) collect data on stranded dolphins as Sara Ann Harris (right) records findings.

(C). Interested research specialists, university professors and their graduate students speculate on causes of stranding.
(D). McLellan begins fleshing out dolphin, inspecting musculature, stomach contents, etc....

taxonomic tool) shaped like that of the striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*).

Having studied dolphin strandings extensively, Perrin and David Coldwell at the University of Florida noted a baffling specimen on the Texas coast which had in common with the spinner dolphin a three-part color scheme (composed of a dark grey cape, a pale grey side panel and a white belly). The spinning behavior exhibited by both *clymene* and spinners had also misled some scientists. For reasons unknown, both of these dolphins leap from the ocean and spin on their long axis before splashing back into the sea. To make matters more complicated, the questionable dolphin cranially resembled the striped dolphin. But the confusion dated back further even to the first description of the species in 1846 when cetologist J. E. Gray based *S. clymene* on a single skull, recording no external description or habitat. Since then it had long been merely a nominal species and

individuals had often been grouped with other species.

At the British Museum of Natural History, which among other things operates the most effective stranding recording system in the world, Perrin noted that Gray's holotype (a standard specimen for species confirmation) for *S. clymene* bore more than a passing resemblance to the specimen beached on the Texas coast. Suspecting the validity of the species, Perrin, et al., with the benefit of new material to examine, "rediscovered" *S. clymene*.

The phenomenally large stranding at Point au Fer had perked Perrin's ears, Potter continued. Of the seven *clymene* occurrences recorded since its rediscovery (usually involving only one mammal) the largest had been seventeen animals beached in the Florida Keys. In mass strandings, like the one at Point au Fer which was nearly three times larger than any previous beaching, scientists can assume that the group is genetically related and this affords them



Photo by H.D. Hoese

added insight. As everyone remembers from biology class, each species in the animal kingdom has identifying characteristics. But unless a scientist has exposure to a sufficient number of animals, it's impossible to discern whether differences from one animal to the next constitute individual variations within a species or actual distinctions between species. In explaining this to me, Potter referred to his supervisor Jim Mead's comment in an earlier letter to us: "Mass strandings are the only way we can assemble enough specimens to attempt to define the range of individual variation."

After a final cup of coffee, we all turned-in. We slept soundly in the close but toasty four-bunk sleeping quarters until roused by a good-humored breakfast call. Then we bundled up, packed it in and set out. With blisters and Band-Aids beneath several layers of socks, I felt I had completed the initiation rites required of scientific field trip trainees. And having

heard their story, I was determined to wait out the inclement weather and give these important marine mammals their due.

After another 24-hours the front did pass. It was an utterly clear day. Pelicans winged by effortlessly as if suspended from a puppeteer's invisible threads. And the air had a remarkably clean feeling as I walked the beach. The seashells cast oval shadows, like eyelids, that receded as the sun rose. And in the next moment, the beach resembled a peacock's tail feathers decorated everywhere with just-blinked-open "eyes."

Granted, I was riding on the relief that comes when you finally see the sun after two days of piercing rain and cold that tests even the best quality new parka. After wincing my way down miles of that unprotected beach, I was now striding along the sand.

With the benefit of more agreeable weather, Guy and I assisted in making numerous "clean hands" measurements. We peered over





their shoulders as Potter and McLellan, equipped with surgical gloves and scalpels, expertly "fleshed out the dolphins" to skeletons and investigated the stomach contents, musculature and genitalia. Guy finally had enough light and was taking photographs. And I wrapped up the story taping our Smithsonian cohorts' comments on a final few questions.

The four-seater float plane, our way back to the mainland, coasted along the canal approaching take off. Airborne, Guy and I requested that we dip down for a parting shot. Potter and McLellan were now bagging each skeleton to pack it in a pick-up and truck back to the Washington, D.C. laboratory. There they were to establish that these cetaceans were truly *S. clymene*. NMNH houses numerous extensive collections for the purposes of serious research over and above their impressive though appreciably smaller museum holdings for the general public. This dramatic addition to the single *S. clymene* skeleton in the research division of the national facility will obviously greatly service the scientific community through the efforts of people like Bill Perrin. They now have the chance to take their inquiries about this "interesting" and "rare" animal a step further.

Strandings:

Mysterious Phenomenon or Scientific Find

OVER THE PAST DECADE public interest in marine mammals and particularly strandings of these has been evident. Educational programs, films and literature such as that written by John Lilly and Jacques Cousteau have made available more information to the general public and generated quite an impressive following. Originally, strandings captured people's attention because of the mystery that surrounds these unexplained phenomena. Today, they are also viewed as unquestionably valuable study sights on species of marine mammals about which little is known.

Sea otters, manatees and sea-cows, seals, and walruses, along with whales and dolphins are all marine mammals. Sensitivity to these animals prompted the effecting of the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 1972.

The report of a stranding to interested specialists can result in an appreciable scientific gain. Immediacy is an issue since, for instance, whales and dolphins spoil rapidly, and in only a few hours dolphins' distinctive color patterns may be lost. There is a national strandings network in place, headquartered at the Smithsonian Institution and funded by the Jacques Cousteau Society, meant to translate what could be a total loss into a worthwhile scientific gain.

If you sight a beached marine mammal, and it is believed that there are a number of cetaceans beached by last season's hurricanes still undiscovered, please call the Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network. Local contacts: Tom Maher (NMFS), 504-589-4538; Max Summers (LDWF), 504-342-9253, and Harry Blanchet (LDWF), 318-369-3807.



Wildlife Leases: Everyone Wins

By Wade Byrd

Photography by Guy LaBranche

"We respect the fact that it is their land and don't want to interfere with their utilization of it. We simply make recommendations that will benefit wildlife."

PUBLIC ACCESS TO FORESTLAND is a touchy subject these days as an ever increasing population is faced with an ever declining amount of open land. Hunters, fishermen, campers, hikers, bird watchers, and nature photographers alike are becoming increasingly familiar with a very prolific newcomer to much of our state's forestland—the posted sign.

A little over thirty-five years ago, when posted lands were the exception rather than the rule, the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries foresaw a need for free-access public lands where Louisiana citizens could pursue their respective outdoor recreational pursuits and opened the Red Dirt, Catahoula and Evangeline Wildlife Management Areas in the Kisatchee National Forest. The areas were leased free from the U.S. Forest Service and although they are no longer part of the system, they were the beginning of what now includes 37 areas and encompasses 1,086,711 acres of wildlife habitat.

The purchase of the Russell Sage WMA in 1960 signaled the beginning of an aggressive department land acquisition program that has resulted in the purchase or acquisition by donation of over 419,000 acres. But, in spite of this accomplishment, the free lease

remains today—as it was in the beginning—the backbone of Louisiana's wildlife management area program. The department currently leases free from private individuals, corporations and other government agencies 666,965 acres or approximately 61 percent of the entire management area system.

Now, lest we get hung up on the term free, let us state unequivocally that while the lease for the land may be free, it's certainly not inexpensive. In fact, about two million dollars, 75 percent of which is federal Pittman-Robertson Act money, is expended annually on management and upkeep of these land areas.

This money goes for building and maintaining roads and bridges, keeping someone on the area to guard against forest fires, poachers, timber theft, litterers, etc. ..., marking boundaries, keeping drainage open and wildlife management programs such as controlled burning, reforestation and planting food plots.

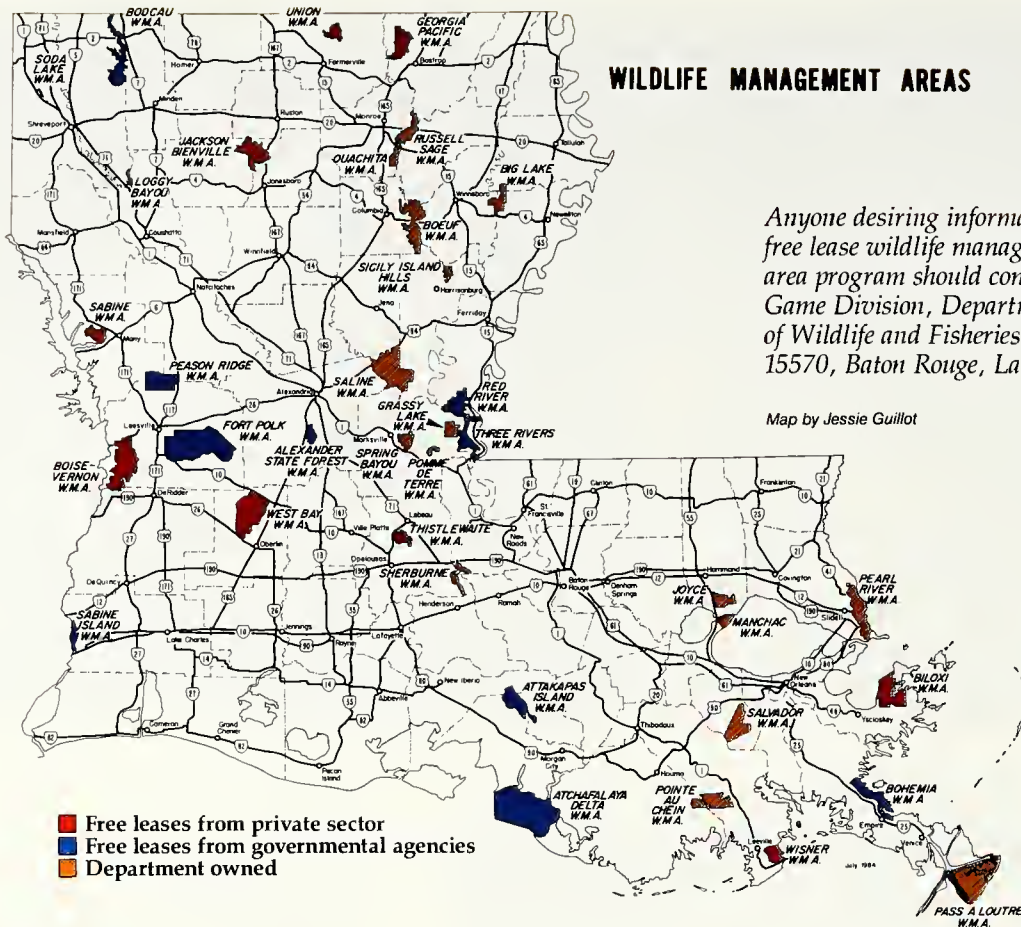
The free lease program is that kind of undertaking where everyone involved benefits. The public benefits because large areas of managed lands are open for all to enjoy, the state benefits because it doesn't have to pay large lease fees in addition to management costs and the landowners derive the benefits described above. And, in the case of corporate owners, it is an avenue for them to express their concern for and responsibility to the citizens of the state regarding forestland recreational opportunities.

Comprising a hair over 30,000 acres in north central Louisiana, the Jackson-Bienville WMA is a sterling

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

Anyone desiring information on the free lease wildlife management area program should contact the Game Division, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, P.O. Box 15570, Baton Rouge, La. 70895.

Map by Jessie Guillot



example of public and private sector cooperation. Wildlife management on the area has resulted in one of the most successful deer and turkey restocking programs in the nation. The area has for some time had the longest either-sex deer season in the state and has consistently proven to be extremely popular with hunters.

In addition, one of the most extensive deer research projects ever attempted regarding the effectiveness of either-sex deer harvests as a management tool was recently completed on Jackson-Bienville and is now in the final stages of publication.

Much of the reason for this successful track record lies in the spirit of mutual cooperation that exists between the department and the current owners of the area, Willamette Industries and Continental Forest Industries.

Luke Lewis, wildlife biologist and spokesman for Willamette, said the Oregon based company is "tickled to death" with the area. A sense of pride is evident in his voice as he talks of success in increasing utilization of the area by deer, turkey and quail.

"We perform wildlife management on all our forest properties, spending several thousand dollars annually on supplemental planting alone," he said. "But Jackson-Bienville WMA, because of its high visibility, provides us with an unparalleled opportunity to portray to the public our genuine concern for wildlife and the environment. For this reason alone, we're happy with the program."

Lewis is also quick to point out other assets of the program like road maintenance, which makes it easier for loggers working the area, and litter, theft and arson prevention.

Jim Taylor, district department game biologist, echoes many of Lewis' sentiments. "For the last few years we have taken approximately 300 deer annually during the either-sex hunt on the area. This year, five or six were over 200 pounds. I believe the area is of such quality that it could easily stand a harvest of twice that much," Taylor says confidently.

He also points out that WMA regulations, such as bans on open fires, permanent tree stands and indiscriminate use of off-road vehicles, prevent forest damage and that just having a man in the woods has often proved advantageous. "For example," he said, "just this last year, we found and reported a few pine beetle spots while they were still in the early stages."

"We respect the fact that it is their land and don't want to interfere with their utilization of it. We simply make recommendations that will benefit wildlife," said Joe Herring, assistant secretary, Office of Wildlife, in explaining department philosophy behind the free lease program.

"We attempt to make the program as attractive as possible to landowners," he said. He explained that the free lease program only covers recreational access, including primitive camping, and that the only basic requirement from a landowner is a minimum 10-year lease. "We need at least a 10-year commitment to justify the money we spend on an area," Herring said.

Herring concluded with the statement, "If it hadn't been for the large corporate landowners, especially the timber companies, the wildlife management area program wouldn't be what it is today. We are aware of that and appreciate their cooperation."

FREE LEASES FROM PRIVATE SECTOR

Biloxi WMA—39,583 acres—*Biloxi Marsh Land Corporation*
Boise-Vernon WMA—54,269 acres—*Boise-Cascade Company*
Georgia-Pacific WMA—27,361 acres—*Georgia-Pacific Corporation*
Jackson-Bienville WMA—31,000 acres—*Willamette Industries, Continental Forest Industries*
Sabine WMA—14,780 acres—*International Paper Company, Boise Southern Co.*
Thistlethwaite WMA—11,100 acres—*Thistlethwaite Heirs*
Union WMA—12,397 acres—*Manville Forest Products Corporation*
West bay WMA—55,185 acres—*Boise Southern Company, Kirby Lumber Co., Quarte-Parish Company*
Wisner WMA—21,621 acres—*Edward Wisner Donation Advisory Committee*
Total 267,296 acres

FREE LEASES FROM GOVERNMENT

Alexander State Forest WMA—7,875 acres—*Office of Forestry-DNR*
Atchafalaya Delta WMA—125,000 acres—*State of Louisiana*
Attakapas WMA—25,500 acres—*State of Louisiana (state land office)*
Bodcau WMA—32,471 acres—*U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*
Bohemia WMA—33,000 acres—*Orleans Levee District*
Fort Polk WMA—109,855 acres—*U.S. Army and U.S. Forest Service*
Peason Ridge WMA—33,488 acres—*U.S. Army*
Red River WMA—11,717 acres—*U.S. Corps of Engineers (Jointly owned with department)*
Sabine Island WMA—8,103 acres—*State of Louisiana (state land office) and Calcasieu Parish School Board*
Soda Lake WMA—1,300 acres—*Caddo Levee District*
Three Rivers WMA—1,085 acres—*U.S. Corps of Engineers (Jointly owned by department.)*
Total 399,669 acres

DEPARTMENT OWNED WMA'S

Big Lake WMA—19,212 acres
Boeuf WMA—38,444 acres
Grassy Lake WMA—13,608 acres
Joyce WMA—13,569 acres (all donated)
Loggy Bayou WMA—3,699 acres
Manchac WMA—8,325 acres
Ouachita WMA—8,745 acres
Pass-a-loutre WMA—66,000 acres (all donated)
Pearl River WMA—34,818 acres
Pointe-au-chien WMA—28,244 acres
Pomme de Terre WMA—6,004 acres
Red River WMA—16,608 acres—*(Jointly owned with U.S. Corps of Engineers)*
Russell Sage WMA—17,280 acres
Saline WMA—60,276 acres
Salvador WMA—30,600 acres
Sherburne WMA—11,780 acres
Sicily Island Hills WMA—6,569 acres (4,158 acres donated)
Spring Bayou WMA—12,078 acres
Three Rivers WMA—23,897 acres—*(Jointly owned with U.S. Corps of Engineers.)*
Total 419,746 acres

March/April 1986



Luke Lewis, left, biologist with Willamette Industries and Jim Taylor, department district game biologist, check food plot on Jackson-Bienville WMA. Planted areas are visible in background.



James Brooks, left, and Jimmy Butcher, right, department personnel stationed on Jackson-Bienville WMA confer with Luke Lewis, biologist with Willamette Industries, owner of the area.

Birding with Blue

By Blue Watson

LISTEN TO THE MOCKINGBIRD

CARL LINNEAUS, the Swedish naturalist who was the "father" of the modern system of biological nomenclature, called it *Mimus polyglottos*. Although we retain the scientific name, the common name is quite different and no species of bird is synonymized with the Southeastern United States more than our mockingbird.

Since the "mock" was first introduced to science by Mark Catesby over 200 years ago this bird has traditionally been considered a southern bird. Since that time, however, the range of *M. polyglottos* has been expanded to cover most of the U.S., but its frequency of occurrence is still greater in the Southeast than elsewhere.

The mockingbird is a medium-sized, gray bird about 10 inches long. It is slender, strong legged, long tailed, with white patches on its wings and along the outside edge of its tail. The white patches are most obvious when the bird is in flight.

The most distinctive identifying trait is its song which consists of long series of musical and grating phrases. These phrases are often repeated several times and many of the songs and calls are imitations of sounds made by other animals or even machines.

When the mockingbird is on the ground feeding it will, on occasion, raise its wings showing a flash of white, then fold them alongside the body and run a few feet forward, stopping abruptly with its head high. This "gymnastic" behavior is often repeated several times in succession. Another behavioral pattern that marks the mockingbird

is its vigorous defense of its territory and its tendency to bedevil dogs and cats by "dive bombing" them until they vacate the area. The object of this aggressive behavior is not limited to dogs and cats. Mockingbirds have no respect for people either.



Mockingbird

Mockingbirds are exceedingly territorial and will defend their "turf" vigorously. They have even been known to attack reflections of themselves which they perceive to be an intruder. The Audubon Field Guide suggests that observers place mirrors in various places around the territory of mockingbirds and observe their behavior. Thus, their territory can be delimited by observing where they do or do not attack the mirror.

The mockingbird nest site is usually near the ground, but it can be found higher than 20 feet. The birds are not particularly disturbed by human proximity and will readily nest in yards in cities and towns. Preferred wild sites appear to be in bushes and small trees along woodland edges.

Nesting generally begins in April or early May. The nest is constructed by both parties of a nesting pair and is built of a wide variety of materials. Nest construction usually takes about three days.

After the nest is built, egg-laying begins and takes approximately four days. The eggs are laid in clutches of four or five. They are

ovate, bluish white to greenish white, often with brownish spots or markings, and average 24.3×18.3 mm in size. Egg-laying is followed by an incubation period of around 11 days. The young are diligently tended and fed by both parents and are usually fledged within two weeks after hatching.

The basic diet of mockingbirds consists of insects and fruit. They eat a wide variety of insects and have been known to take lizards and on at least one occasion of record, a snake. They also consume many types of wild and domestic fruit. Mockingbirds have been accused of being crop predators, but systematic observation and stomach content analysis have not verified that they represent a major threat to fruit growers.

As stated above, the voice is probably the most notable characteristic of the mockingbird. Mr. Arthur Cleveland Bent in his book entitled *Life Histories of North American Nuthatches, Wrens, Thrashers and Their Allies*, states: "There is no possibility of doubt that the vocal attainments of the mockingbird are its primary characteristic. Its voice overshadows its every other trait, habit and even appearance." He further writes, "The vocal powers of the mockingbird exceed, both in their imitative notes and natural song, those of any other species."

Keep an ear out for *Mimus polyglottos* at almost any time of the day or night. Look and listen for them perched high upon power poles or in the tree tops. During spring and summer nights when the moon is bright, turn off the air conditioners and open your windows for a while. Anyone who has heard this bird sing on a moonlit night will understand why our language is inadequate to completely characterize what our ears perceive.

Editor's Note: Biologist Blue Watson is a 14-year veteran of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and coordinator of the Ecological Studies Section. He holds a B.S. in zoology and an M.S. in physiology from LSU. Blue is an avid bird watcher and edited the latest edition of the popular "Common Birds of Louisiana."

Conservationotes



Waterfowl Stamp Offered

Waterfowl U.S.A., a non-profit conservation organization, and the Boy Scouts of America in a joint venture are helping sustain the remarkable comeback of the wood duck.

Waterfowl U.S.A. has launched a national marketing project for the lovely limited-edition wildlife print and stamp "Autumn Wood Ducks" by Louisiana artist Randy McGovern. The proceeds will fund the placement by the Boy Scouts of nesting boxes for wood ducks in the swamps of Louisiana.

The signed and numbered prints are \$95, while the stamps cost \$5. Both can be ordered from Waterfowl U.S.A., P.O. Box 50, Edgefield, South Carolina 29824. Allow 2-4 weeks for delivery.

State Again Leads in Seafood Output

Louisiana once again has led the nation in seafood production. Preliminary statistics compiled by the National Marine Fisheries Service show that in 1984 more than 1.9 billion pounds of seafood was landed in Louisiana.

More than 106 million pounds of shrimp was landed. This is the second highest shrimp output ever recorded in Louisiana, exceeded only by the 112 million pounds landed in 1981 and well over the 15-year average of 85.5 million pounds.

Louisiana led all other states in shrimp production, with more than 35 percent of the 301.8 million pounds landed in the United States.

The landings of 29.6 million pounds of blue crabs were the highest recorded since 1945, and the 13.5 million pounds of oyster meats has been exceeded in recent times only by the 13.7 million pounds landed in 1975. The Gulf region—principally Louisiana, with 51 percent of the re-

gion's total—led the United States in the production of oyster meats.

Landings of menhaden reached the record level of 1.7 billion pounds for the second year in a row. More menhaden is caught in the United States than any other species, and Louisiana contributed well over half of the 2.9 billion pounds landed in 1984.

The dockside value of Louisiana's 1984 landings exceeded \$259 million. As usual, shrimp was the most valuable fishery, accounting for \$143 million of the total value to fishermen. The second most valuable fishery was menhaden, with landings valued at more than \$68 million.

OGT Rewards 15 Informants

Fifteen citizens will share a total of \$4,100 in the latest round of rewards to be paid by Operation Game Thief, Louisiana's grass-roots campaign to wipe out poaching.

The 15 citizens provided information that led to the arrest of 31 suspected wildlife-law violators, according to officials of

the privately funded OGT program. The rewards range from \$100 to \$500.

Ten of the cases reported involve deer hunting, two involve duck hunting, two fishing and one hunting at night. A total of 66 citations was issued, some of the suspects facing multiple charges.

The alleged violations were spread through 13 parishes, and most of them took place last December. Arrests were handled by the Enforcement Division of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

In another action, wildlife biologist Andrew J. Harrison Jr. of Plaquemine was elected OGT president. Harrison succeeds Marc Dupuy Jr. of Marksville, who had served as president since the organization was founded two years ago. Tenure in the post is limited by charter.

Other OGT officers were re-elected. They are J.D. McHenry Jr. of Monroe, vice president; W.H. Chapman of Sulphur, secretary; and Charles E. Wiggins Sr. of Shreveport, treasurer.

Financed by private contributions, Operation Game Thief pays rewards to citizens who report hunting, fishing and wildlife conservation offenses by phoning 1-800-442-2511. Rewards as high as \$1,000 are paid if an arrest is made. The informant remains anonymous.



Fisherman's Friend Award: "Tee" John Mialjevich (left), president, Concerned Shrimpers of Louisiana, Inc., is shown presenting the Fourth Annual Fisherman's Friend Award to William S. "Corky" Perret, assistant secretary, Office of Coastal and Marine Resources, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The award was presented at the annual meeting of the Concerned Shrimpers in Thibodaux, La., on February 15.

Houck Gets Top Award

One of Louisiana's most coveted distinctions, Conservationist of the Year, has been conferred upon Oliver A. Houck, professor of environmental and criminal law at Tulane University.

Houck was presented with the Governor's Award, a statuette of a bald eagle that goes with his new title, at the 47th convention of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, held in New Iberia in February.

Eight other award recipients also were named under the 22nd annual Governor's State Conservation Achievement Program, sponsored by Sears, Roebuck & Co. and conducted by LWF.

Houck, 46, joined the National Wildlife Federation as general counsel in Washington in 1971. Immediately he was instrumental in halting federal dredging operations in Louisiana's Atchafalaya Basin.

After serving as LWF's vice president for conservation, Houck joined the Tulane faculty in 1981. He lectures to law students on wildlife and environmental topics, and is nationally known

for his continuing work on behalf of conservation.

Other award winners were:

Ted Joanen, Professional Conservationist of the Year. Alligator authority and leading researcher for the Fur and Refuge Division of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Joanen is stationed at the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge.

Marc Dupuy Jr., Nonprofessional Conservationist of the Year. This Marksville attorney's long record of volunteer work in behalf of conservation is capped by his service as the first president (1984-85) of Operation Game Thief.

Raceland Junior High School, Youth Conservationist of the Year. Among other activities, this 28-pupil group plants trees, places nesting boxes for ducks and squirrels, and sponsors field trips for schoolchildren.

Williams, Inc., Conservationist of the Year as a Corporation, Firm or Company. Williams carefully tends the 88,000 acres it owns inside and outside the Atchafalaya Basin, and promotes conservation and research at its Indigo Island Crawfish

and Migratory Waterfowl Experiment Station.

Paul Jackson, Conservation Educator of the Year. Working out of Lake Charles for the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Jackson coordinates mandatory hunter safety education in 16 parishes of southwest Louisiana.

Pat Norton, Public Servant Conservationist of the Year. As secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality, she directs efforts to protect the natural environment of both the humans and wildlife that inhabit it.

Morning Advocate, Conservationist Communications Award. This Baton Rouge newspaper published a 40-page supplement pinpointing the state's environmental problems. The supplement, entitled "Prosperity in Paradise? Louisiana's Chemical Legacy," appeared April 25, 1985.

Louisiana Wildlife Association, Conservation Organization of the Year. Organized in Shreveport only three years ago, the association has made its impact felt in both private and political circles on virtually every conceivable issue dealing with sound wildlife management.

In a special presentation, Virgil J. Bourque Jr. of Gonzales, immediate past president of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, received a distinguished service citation from the National Wildlife Federation.

Writers Cite Williams

Frank B. Williams, New Orleans business executive, has been honored by the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association for his long-standing efforts in behalf of migratory waterfowl.

Williams received LOWA's Arthur Van Pelt Award at the annual meeting of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation in New Iberia.

Williams is widely recognized for his leadership in preserving and restoring the historic waterfowl breeding and wintering areas of both the United States and Canada. Active for nearly 30 years as a fund raiser for Ducks Unlimited, he is that organization's senior vice president in charge of development.

His company, Williams, Inc., which engages in oil and gas operations, maintains the Indigo Island Crawfish and Migratory Waterfowl Experiment Station as a refuge and research facility on the fringe of the Atchafalaya Basin.



Prof. Oliver A. Houck (light suit) is acclaimed as Louisiana's Conservationist of the Year. From left are Gene Stout, Region 8 director of the National Wildlife Federation; Houck; J. Burton Angelle Sr., secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries; and George Halsey, central vice president of the NWF.



Frank B. Williams (left) accepts plaque from Paul Kalman, representing the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association.

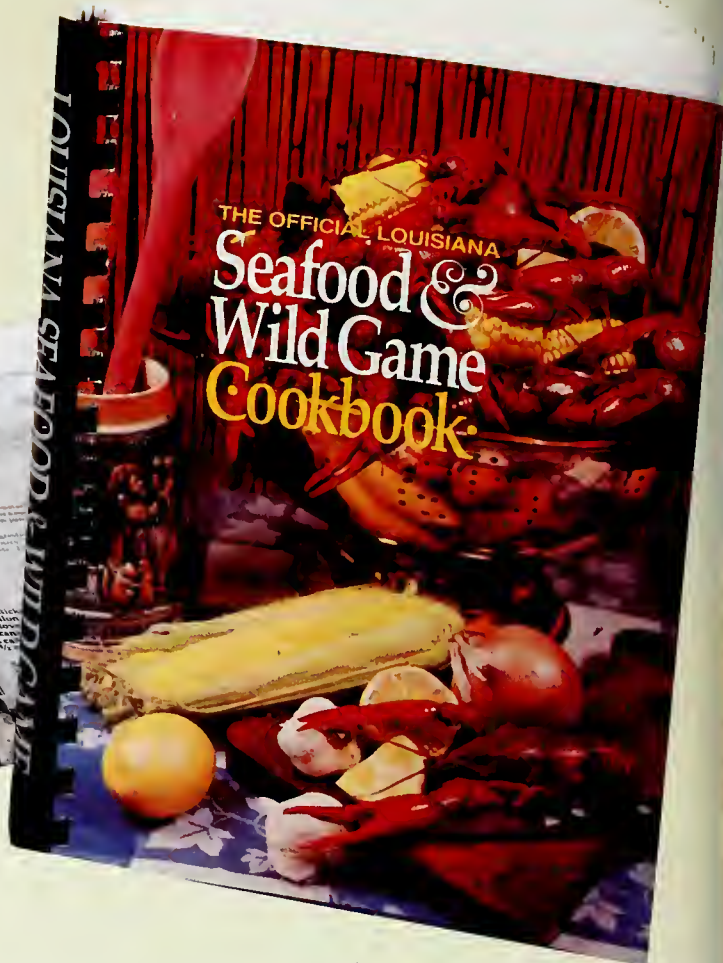


Agent Repeats: Lt. Emmett Bonner of Vidalia is Shikar-Safari Club International's choice as Louisiana Wildlife Officer of the Year. Here he receives a commendation plaque from C. Richard Cochran of Lafayette, representing the association of conservationists and hunters. Two years ago Bonner was named Agent of the Year by the state agency he serves, the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.



Conservationists display their trophies. Standing (from left) are Mike Dunne, Sonny Albarado and Bob Anderson, all of the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate; Charles E. Wiggins Sr. of the Louisiana Wildlife Association; Frank B. Williams, holding award from Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association; Ted Joanen; Charles Seyburn Williams, holding award to Williams, Inc.; Paul Jackson; Oliver A. Houck; Pat Norton; and Marc Dupuy Jr. Seated are Raceland Junior High School pupils Don Hohensee, Jess Boyles, Lisa Foret, Andre Gervais, Alison Theriot and Lance deHart.

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Bayou Kitchen

by Wayne Miller



BAKED CATFISH DIJON

2 pounds catfish fillets
Salt to taste
Pepper to taste
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup thinly sliced onion
2 tablespoons butter
1 cup mayonnaise
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons dry vermouth
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Tabasco
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh parsley

Preheat oven to 350°. Arrange fish in a shallow baking dish, salt and pepper liberally; cover with sliced onion; dot with butter. Bake 20 minutes or until fish flakes easily. Mix mayonnaise, mustard, vermouth and Tabasco. Pour over fish and broil 2 to 3 minutes, until brown and bubbly. Sprinkle parsley over top of finished dish. Serve hot with lemon wedges.

ZUCCHINI CASSEROLE

2 slices bacon, cut up
1 cup mushrooms, chopped
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped onions
Dash garlic salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup melted butter
3 medium zucchini, grated
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cup cracker crumbs
1 egg, beaten
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup Monterey Jack cheese

Partly cook bacon slices. Combine all ingredients, topping with cheese. Bake in a 2-quart casserole, covered, for 40 minutes at 350°.

MARINATED CARROTS

5 cups sliced fresh carrots
1 large onion, sliced
1 bell pepper, sliced
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vinegar
Salt to taste
1 can condensed tomato soup
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
1 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon dry mustard
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

Boil sliced carrots till tender. Drain. Mix dry ingredients. Add tomato soup, oil, vinegar, and Worcestershire sauce. Pour mixture over carrots, onion, and bell pepper. Serves 8-10.

May be eaten at once or marinated overnight.

